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Iannone, Carol: Letters Opposing Nomination of  
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1991

# Iannone, Carol: Letters Opposing Nomination of (1991): Correspondence 24

Phyllis Franklin

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MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

10 ASTOR PLACE

NEW YORK, NY 10003

29 March 1991

Lynne V. Cheney  
Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities  
Washington, DC 20506

Dear Lynne:

Thank you for your letter of 27 March, which shed light on the questions you have raised about the National Humanities Alliance study of the NEH National Council on the Humanities. I shared with John Hammer the information you provided on your approach to classifying NEH council members. The NHA believes it can explain the mystery of the conflicting percentages. I enclose a document John Hammer prepared; I hope you will find it useful.

The document makes clear, at least to me, that whether one counts your way or the NHA way, there was a decline in the representation of college and university humanities faculty on the NEH council from 1975 to 1990. (I use your terminology here.) I understand that the most recent appointments to the NEH council have begun to reverse the downward trend.

But the NHA report is not the major point of difference between us. The MLA continues to oppose the nomination of Carol Iannone to the NEH council. As we said before, Carol Iannone's record is not without merit; it is without distinction, and the legislation calls for "established records of distinguished service and scholarship or creativity." Even in the areas in which you believe Dr. Iannone's record should be evaluated--as an undergraduate teacher and a writer on contemporary cultural matters--her experience and achievement are limited.

In making this comment, we are not judging the merit of any individual's career path; we are responding to a legislative requirement for service on the NEH council. This requirement seems appropriate because people with distinguished records are likely to bring the wisdom and experience needed for service on a national board. For this reason the MLA thinks Carol Iannone's nomination is premature.

You suggest that the MLA's reputation may be damaged because we have expressed our reservations about the nomination of Carol Iannone. The MLA Executive Council considered with great care whether such action was necessary. Silence is said to be consent. How could the MLA remain

silent when it believes the NEH would be better served if its council were made up of people who meet the legislative requirements? We do not see how citizens of the United States can damage their reputations when they act responsibly and convey to members of Congress their views on matters about which they have special knowledge.

I note in conclusion that the MLA was one of the organizations that urged the establishment of the NEH, and it continues to support the endowment and its vital work. On occasion, as you know, the MLA has also acted as a member of the loyal opposition and urged changes in the NEH's policies and practices. After careful consideration our council concluded that, once again, it must play this role.

Sincerely yours,

Phyllis Franklin  
Executive Director

cc: Members of the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources  
Members of the MLA Executive Council  
John Hammer